



“The Impact Of The Provision Of Educational Rights In The Inclusion Of Students With Disabilities In General Schools Of Mangan District Of Sikkim”

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*“Where the mind is without fear And head held high
Where knowledge is free...”*

Rabindranath Tagore

Abstract

Keeping in mind the educational facilities of the times, Article 45 of the Constitution of India in 1950 provided for free and compulsory education for children until they are 14yrs of age and achieve the target of Universalization of Education(UEE) in 10 years. This target was far too ambitious to achieve. Hence, the target dates were revised several times. During the decade 1991-2001, a number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes, like the mid day meal scheme as well as new programmes and projects like that of District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), District Institute of Educational Training (DIET) were initiated across the Country. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which is now Samagra Shiksha was another ambitious program launched by the government whose focus was infrastructural improvement, reduction of drop-out rates and quality education. In the 86th Constitutional Amendment in 2002, Article 21A was added making the Right to Education a fundamental Right for children between the ages 6 to 14. It was ratified in 2009 and hence Right to Education, RTE Act -2009 was enacted to ensure that every child of age 6 to 14 years is enrolled with no target achievement. Provisions of the Act came into force in 1st April 2010. Students with disabilities are enrolled in various schools with the support of special teachers, parents and authorities of respective schools. This paper through a small scale study, reports on the enrolment of students with disabilities as an impact of RTE Act -2009 in the district of Mangan, Sikkim.

Key words: Enrolment, Students with Disabilities, Samagra Shiksha, Centrally Sponsored

Schemes, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Low Vision, Speech and Hearing Unique Disability Identity (UDID) ADIP Scheme

Purpose of the Study

Education is the tool of change they say. By providing free education along with enrolment in regular schools students with disabilities are only exercising their rights and we are on our way toward building an inclusive society. Our ancient knowledge system dates way back thousands of years ago. Our Vedas and various other scriptures bear testament to this fact.

Education was imparted to students in gurukulas and rishikulas or ashrams which were inclusive in nature. Students could choose their profession depending on their interest and aptitude. The rich legacy of our ancient knowledge system and its philosophies continue to influence the modern system of education which is evident in our National Education Policy, NEP-2020.

United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, UNDHR in 10th December 1948 declared education as everyone's right in its Article number 26. It also said that all men are born equal.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, UNCRC-1989, a convention that was ratified by almost all nations of the world sets the standard of health, education, legal, civil and social services for a child.

It is in 1990, World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to meet basic learning needs was adopted which talks about an education with basic learning needs comprising of literacy numeracy and problem solving tools that may enable the children and youth to develop their full capacities through survival skills and other skills that can empower them to live life with dignity.

Sustainable Development goals SDG-2030 directly impact children in terms of eradicating malnutrition, access to health care including the rights of a child who are farthest behind. This is undoubtedly a pre-requisite for achieving the goals by 2030.

This paper seeks to understand if students with disability in Mangan district of Sikkim are benefiting from the provisions they are entitled to in the lines of the above mentioned declarations and conventions.

Samagra Shiksha

Samagra Shiksha is an Indian version of making the rights of a child 'real'. It has been set up for implementing the overall requirements of a child in the field of education from preschool to class XII. It supports the implementation of Rights of a child for free and compulsory education under RTE, Act 2009 and NEP-2020. It supports early childhood care and education.

Samagra Shiksha in Sikkim

Sikkim, too has implemented school education which is inclusive under Samagra Shiksha from preschool to class XII. Students with disabilities are enrolled and monitored under the program.

- Objectives of Samagra Shiksha

In the light of NEP-2020 the program aims to provide affordable, quality, and accessible secondary education to all young people between the ages of 14 and 18 till 2025-26.

- Focal Areas

Samagra Shiksha focuses on teacher education, universal enrolment, access and retention, quality of education, and inclusive education.

Research Location- Mangan, a District in the northern part of Sikkim

Mangan, a gateway to unparalleled beauty is the largest of the 6 districts of Sikkim. As per the data released by census India, 2011 density of population is 10 per square kilometer. Landscape of Mangan is extremely picturesque as numerous waterfalls astride the main road. Landslides are a common affair due to the melting of snow beds at the top of the mountains. Temperatures range from 25 to -40 degrees in 6000 metres high altitude areas. Kanchenjunga is the highest peak at 8000m standing with the eastern border of Nepal and can be seen clearly from the town of Singhik.

Historical Importance of Mangan

Exquisite, thrilling and vibrant: these are the three words that describe Mangan District. It offers adventurers to nature lovers with a vast treasure of alpine beauty; valleys covered with flowers and a showcase of vibrant ethnic communities that reside in the high altitude mountains. The region provides magnificent views of the mountain ranges of the Khangchendzonga and Mt. Siniolochu; treks through gentle meadows overlooking the snow laden mountain and the mystical Guru Dongmar Lake are truly a divine experience. In addition, the rural scenery filled with monasteries, meadows and lush green forest creates an ambience of paradise on earth. The northern most parts of the district merge with the Tibetan plateau and lend a unique character to the region.

Places of Interest around Mangan District

KABI LUNGCHOK:

It is located 17 km from Gangtok along the North Sikkim Highway. The place is of historical importance to the Sikkimese because it was the venue where the treaty for brotherhood was affirmed between the Lepcha Chief Tekung Tek and the Bhutia chief named Khey Bhumsa.

Amidst a dense cover of forest the historical treaty is marked by a memorial stone.

PHENSANG MONASTERY:

The monastery is built on a hill slope that runs from Kabi Lungchok to Phodong and is adorned with beautiful landscapes. It was built in 1721 and belongs to the Nyingma-pa sect.

PHODONG MONASTERY: It is located 38 km from Gangtok and is one among the six important Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim. It was built by Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal in the eighteenth century.

SEVEN SISTER FALLS:

The Seven Sister Falls is located 32 km from Gangtok along the National Highway leading to Mangan District. A picturesque waterfall awaits the visitor with a watching shed where they can enjoy the magnificent view of the waterfall and click memorable photographs.

SINGHIK:

Singhik's ideal location provides spectacular close views of Mt. Kanchenjunga and the graceful Mt. Siniolochu. Tourists can venture for short natural treks along the higher slopes of the mountain.

RONG LUNGTEN LEE:

The Rong-Lungten-Lee is a replica of a traditional Lepcha's house. It consists of three rooms and an attic; tourists are allowed to visit and witness the unique lifestyle of the Lepchas. Nearby is the Namprikdang where lies the confluence of the Teesta and Kanaka rivers.

CHUNGTHANG:

Chungthang is the point where the downhill descent of the Teesta begins followed by the confluence of the Lachen and Lachung Chu River. Chungthang is located 95 km from Gangtok, 23 km from Lachung and 29 km from Lachen and populated mainly by the Lepcha ethnic community.

LACHUNG:

Lachung is a popular destination because of its proximity to Yumthang; it is located at a distance of 25 km from Yumthang. The Lachung village has a local self governing body called the 'Dzumsa' and the villagers have retained their unique cultural identity over the years in this region. The area of the village is stretched on either side of Lachung and the Lachung monastery is the prominent place for all religious and cultural activities.

YUMTHANG:

Yumthang is the largest draw in North Sikkim. Situated at an elevation of 11,800 feet surrounded by snow-clad mountains, rhododendrons, hot-springs and the vibrant local communities, it has everything an ideal alpine tour can offer. Some travellers even compare it to the beauty of the Swiss Alps. For adventure seekers it offers treks to the Green Lake and Phunithoka.

LACHEN:

Lachen can be reached by a 6 hour drive from Gangtok and is situated at an altitude of 2750 meters. Chief attraction is the Lachen Monastery standing on top of the village which provides excellent views of the alpine landscape and lush green countryside. Home stays are available for accommodation in the village.

THANGU:

Thangu is situated at an altitude of 14,000 ft; it is the base for treks to the Guru Dongmar Lake and Cho Lhamu – the source of the River Teesta.

GURU DONGMAR LAKE:

The Guru Dongmar Lake is not only the most sacred lake in Sikkim revered both by the Hindus and Buddhist people, but provides a sight and ambience that takes one's breath away with its mystical and unparalleled charm.

About People of Sikkim:

The culture, religion, customs and traditions of different communities of people living in Sikkim constitute a homogeneous blend. These three communities are the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis. In urban areas many people have settled which are engaged in business and government services. Due to the development activities in the state like the construction of roads, bridges and buildings various labourers migrated from the plains and Nepal. A majority of population of Mangan District comprises of Bhutias, Lepchas and less number of Nepalis. The Lepchas are predominantly concentrated in the Dzongu Areas, Bhutias are seen from Kabi-Tingda to LachenLachung. Nepalis are found mixed up around Phodong, Mangshila and Mangan. Bhutias and Lepchas are usually Bhuddist and Nepalis are Hindus, whereas around 1 % of populations from all tribes have lately converted to Christians.

The Lepchas: The Lepchas were the original inhabitants of Sikkim before the Bhutias and

Nepalis. The word 'Lepcha' means the ravine folk.

The Bhutias: The Bhutias originally belong to the Tibet. These people migrated to Sikkim after the 15th century and settled in Mangan District. These people are known as the Lachenpas and Lachungpas in the Mangan District. The Bhutias speak the Sikkimese language, a dialect of the Tibetan language. Bhutias constitute about ten percent of the total population of Sikkim.

Nepalis: The Nepalis are third type of people that live in Sikkim after the Bhutias. They migrated in large numbers in Sikkim after the Lepchas and Bhutias. Today, the Nepalis constitute more than 80 % of the total population of Sikkim. The Nepalis introduced the terraced system of cultivation and the cardomom was an important cash crop introduced by them.

Methodology

Data was collected purposively from District Coordinators of Inclusive Education, general teachers of regular schools and parents of students with disabilities of Mangan district. Firstly, a meeting was organized with all of them at a common place. The purpose of the study was intimated to them. The second meeting was on a one to one basis where inputs from each of them were taken through discussion and interaction. The other rounds of interaction were conducted over phone and other modes. Open ended-research questions were asked which were purely on the benefits they have been receiving in the education of their wards in case of parents, students in case of teachers and institution based questions in case of district coordinators. They were then sorted, analysed qualitatively and reported.

Findings

A. Educational Status of Students with disabilities in Mangan.

a. Role of ASHA Workers in Early Child Education and Care

As per media reports dated 30 Nov 2021, The All Sikkim ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) Welfare Association conducted ASHA Sammelan 2021 along with Health and Family Welfare Department declared that Sikkim has around 667 ASHA workers who have implemented various schemes in the villages of Sikkim. They have supported vaccination drives and have been providing early education to all children in the age group of 3-5yrs.

b. District Coordinators, Inclusive Education

Information received from the office of District Coordinator and Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) mentions that around 80 children with disabilities are enrolled in various schools of Mangan both government and private.

Around 5 Students were identified for the study whose details have been summed up as follows. Names of the students have been changed for ethical purpose. However, the disability conditions of each are kept intact.

1. Hildamit Lepcha

Hildamit is 11yrs of age. His disability condition is Cerebral Palsy; possesses a disability certificate and UDID. His father, Gyan Lepcha works in a private sector company and is aware of his son's condition and is keen to educate him further. Hildamit studies in class 4 in a private school at Mangan. Parents are separated. His mother could not be contacted.

2. Jerman Lepcha

Jerman is 14years young. His condition is speech and hearing disability. He studies in class VII in a private school at Mangan. His father, Keepu Lepcha is working after he got a job under one family one job scheme of Govt. of Sikkim. Mother, Tsering Lepcha, is a housewife. She is alcoholic. Jerman is a keen observer and loves school. He has heard about sign language and wishes to learn sign language. He was using a hearing aid which was out of battery. It was found after assessment that he needed a hearing aid.

3. Nima Dorjee

Nima, 9yrs, is having cerebral palsy. She reads in class 1 in a government school of Mangan. Teachers have identified some traces of learning disability in her as she forgets what is taught to her and finds difficulty in recalling things. She is a part of a disturbed family background with an alcoholic mother. She will be provided teaching learning material as she doesnot have one.

4. Sara

Sara was born in 2015 and studies in class 3. She doesnot have a disability certificate. Teachers have identified the condition with her features. They have intimated the parents about the condition of their ward and asked them to do an assessment at the district hospital but the parents are in denial mode. It was felt during the interactions that they needed counseling. They will be informed to attend parents training programs that are organized by various organizations. Her father Sonam Dorjee has a private job. Mother Samantha is a house-wife. Sara has one elder brother, Cherry who is in class 10.

5. Ewen Bhutia

Ewen, a 13 year old boy has low vision. He is in class in 4 in a government school near his residence. He uses adapted spectacles. Pempa Bhutia, his father has a private job.

Discussion

Articles 8-9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), provides for the Right to Preservation of Identity and the Right Not to Be Separated from His or Her Parents. This provision holds true in all the cases as all the 5 students were admitted as day scholars. It was found that the parents dropped them to school and then picked them up after the school thus building a sense of belongingness among the wards. It served as a motivation and ample reason to persevere.

The UDISE+ 2021-22 data reveals that the overall dropout rate in schools in India at primary level is 1.5 percent, which is lower than the previous year's rate of 1.8 percent. However, the rate is still a concern, especially in certain states. This drop in the drop-out rate may be attributed to the changing attitude of students with disabilities.

The fact that parents did not have to pay tuition fees to school was one big aspect that came out during the interaction with parents. It gave them immense relief from a huge financial burden. Hildamit's father thanked the authorities for making education of his son free which was according to him a big boon and blessing. He would also be provided with a hearing aid as he was entitled to receive one from the Scheme of Assistance to the Persons with Disabilities for purchase/fitting of Aids & Appliances (ADIP Scheme) under Department For Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE), Govt. Of India.

The fact that these students are regularly attending school every day with their parents is something commendable. It only shows that parents of these children with disabilities are responsible and very well aware of their condition and that if the right kind of support is provided to them they will certainly be able to look after themselves in future.

Ewen was blessed as he had the privilege of studying in a government school near his residence which means he is studying in a neighbourhood school (RTE Act, 2009). That surely is an added advantage. He uses his residual vision amply for movement. He could be assessed and provided low vision aids that he can use for studies.

Mangan, although a beautiful place is also prone to natural disasters. It was devastated by the disaster that had occurred in the early hours of 4th Oct'2024. Life has not been the same thereafter. Students with disabilities have withstood this fury of nature and many others that from time to time ravage their homes and settlements. They have learnt and still are learning the lessons of life by being together in tough times and supporting each other in times of need is something worth mentioning.

CONCLUSION

The impact of the provision of educational rights in the inclusion of persons with disabilities has been positive. Although the society has been successful in getting students with disabilities in classrooms, it has not been able to deal with the other evils that exist in society-like alcoholism and other sources of addiction.

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